

Text: John Matthew 15:21-28

Title: They Don't Deserve It!

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

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Our scripture lesson today comes from Matthew, Chapter 15. Hear the word of God

**Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."**

**Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."**

**He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."**

**The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.**

**He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."**

**"Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."**

**Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.**

When Michele and I got married we thought it would be romantic to honeymoon in London and Paris. We had a lot of fun. But one incident was noteworthy—we needed to travel from London to Paris, so rather than spending all day taking a train down to the coast and the hover craft across the English Channel we decided it would be quicker to fly. Just as we were approaching Paris the pilot informed us that he was having trouble getting the landing gear down and was ordering fire engines to follow us down the runway. A moment later he says assume crash positions.

One begins to seriously evaluate life and get real religious in such a situation. I looked around and saw the anguish and fear on other people's faces. My thoughts turned to prayer as I cried out Lord have mercy on us...either now saving us from our present peril, or as you assign us to our eternal homes. Notice this was the cry of the woman in our passage—Have Mercy.

This heathen woman teaches us a lot about our faith and our Lord. When our receptors are up you'll find God often speaks through people who do not fit into proper religious categories.

Canaanites were people of reproach. They were the people Israel displaced from the promise land. The people God said wipe off the face of the earth. Which is a source of dissention for the skeptics—how could a good God take away another people's land and do so in a brutal manner? The reason is found in Deuteronomy 18:9-12. These people were Satan worshippers who sacrificed their children burning them alive to demon gods.

Notice the correlation between that culture and her daughter's situation—the child is cruelly demon possessed. It is popular to assume demon possession is synonymous with unexplained physical or psychological illnesses...these unsophisticated folks would not have the medical

expertise to explain a physical ailment. The argument is it was probably just epilepsy. However, the N.T. differentiates between physical ailments and demon affliction.

Many feel demons make for good movies, but are not real. It is interesting to listen to Missionaries who serve in third world countries and report demonic possession as a widespread reality.

I had a professor share how when he was serving in Africa a woman was walking three feet off the ground in the air with men surrounding her chanting. The Missionary yelled come down from there. One of the men glared at him and the missionary was knocked off his feet. The missionary gets back up on his feet and says in the name of Jesus Come Down. The girl collapses to the ground. The men were going to have the missionary killed, but the girl told the chief of the town that she felt freed, so the chief let the missionary go free.

While we do not see people walking three feet off the ground, the demons in our western culture are more subtle. Drug addiction; Porn comes from the root word demonic. Another demon comes in the form of pornography—The Ashtray in the O.T. were nude female idols...when we are addicted to something that pulls us away from God's will we are dealing with demonic influence.

Let me clarify: believers cannot be possessed by demons, but we can drift into behaviors that open ourselves up to demonic control.

Let's focus on the woman's request, she says Lord have mercy on me for my daughter is cruelly demon possessed. Her prayer for another has become her own need. This is a primary component of Intercessory prayer...When we immerse ourselves into the trials and afflictions of others to the point that their tears become our own—this is when we bear one another's burdens. To pray for one who has lost a child is to mentally place your child in that situation to understand the gravity of the parents' pain.

Notice that Jesus does not answer her word. It seems Jesus is indifferent to her pain. Maybe you can relate...we ask God for something but we don't receive an answer. So we wonder Lord don't you care about me?

Possibly Jesus is silent to test her faith? I think Jesus is actually testing His disciples. How are they going to respond? Do they hear the cry of those hurting? If this is the case—the disciples failed miserably. They found the woman an annoyance. They tell Jesus Send her away! Demonstrating no compassion whatsoever.

This was typical behavior they shooed the children away, they asked Jesus to send the crowds home—others needs were bothersome nuisances. Which of course raises the questions how do we handle the needs of those around us: The needy, the dirty, the foreigner, those with different politics, class, proclivity-etc...

This interchange takes place during one of the few occasions on which Jesus was outside of Jewish territory and followed the controversy Jesus had with the Pharisees about what is clean and unclean. . Jesus wants to teach the disciples the transcendent nature of the gospel message & redefine what is clean and unclean.

Well in spite of hearing His disciples annoyed requests to shun her and receiving the hard answer that silence can be—the woman refuses to give up.

Finally, Jesus responds, I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. No doubt this was a blow to her hopes. Jesus sounds so exclusive from what we know about His mission to save the world. The fact of the matter is Jesus initial ministry was to His people. The Jewish faith was the instrument through which God chose to reveal Himself.

Furthermore, we see the importance He ascribes to His own. If Jesus was driving down the road and saw two cars broken down on the side who would He pull over to help--the Christian or the non Christian? He'd pull over to help the Christian...if you were driving down the road and saw one of your children broken down on and noticed a stranger as well who would stop to help? Your child! Our Lord is definitely concerned about those who do not know Him, but His first priority is the well being of His own.

Friends will say I never pray about my own needs Jesus has more important things to worry about than me...but if you reflect on the prayer we discussed last week in John 17 the Lord's main concern was for His Disciples. This ought to empower you to take your issues to the Lord in prayer with confidence! Why do we think Christ will save us from our sins but not from our situations?

By the way the Lord would pullover on the road to help you and then want you to go and help the other on His behalf.

Though Christ's words appear a bit harsh, a dialogue has begun between the woman and the Lord. Entering into a conversation with Jesus is the best place to be.

Many live by the maxim if at first you don't succeed—the heck with it. The truth is pursuing Christ is not always easy: It takes time, it is inconvenient, society sneers at God as a crutch. Most let the obstacles detour the pursuit of God, but not this woman—she will not give up.

At first she was crying out to Jesus from a distance, but once conversation is established she deflects the initial negativity and weaves her way into His presence for a face to face encounter.

Then comes the most difficult statement—what appears to be nothing less than a prejudice contemptuous insult. Jesus refers to the woman as a dog. Scholars try to extricate Jesus from this uncomfortable comment—He did not really say this—someone wrote it down incorrectly, others come to Jesus' defense saying Jesus said it playfully with a nice tone of voice (You Dog).

Maybe Jesus humanity is surfacing? After all consider His travel itinerary: He just fed the 5,000, He's healing the sick, arguing with Pharisees, teaching the crowds...fatigue is making Jesus irritable.

I think Jesus means it. The woman does not deserve the healing she is outside of the theological bounds of God's family—associated with the opposition. It is interesting that the woman does not argue or refute this comment because she knows He is right.

As we stand before a Holy God the last thing we want is what we deserve. We tend to measure life in terms of the sinful human scale of justice, which inevitably overlooks the higher standard to which we are called & by which we are measured.

Philip Yancey tells about an incident when Peace makers visited a group of Polish Christians after WW2 asking would you be willing to meet with Christians from Germany who want to ask forgiveness for what Germany did to Poland. There was silence. Then one spoke up what you are asking is impossible. Each stone of Warsaw is soaked in Polish blood. We cannot forgive. Before the group departed they said the Lord's Prayer. When they reached the words forgive us

our sins as forgive those who sin against us...everyone stopped praying. Tension swelled in the room. The pole, who vehemently stated— no forgiveness, said I must say yes or I cannot call myself a Christian if I refuse to forgive.

This is the higher standard and when it comes to deserving grace no one does—we all stand with the Canaanite woman.

When you look at the Lord's response the word He uses for dog is not the same Greek term used in Matthew 7:6 when Christ says Do not give what is Holy to the dogs. That is a reference to the large flea ridden dogs that scavenged around garbage heaps. The word Jesus uses here is *Dunaria*, which is a reference to puppies and household pets. Jesus is not insulting this woman calling her a dog, but is informing her of her identity as outside the kingdom of God.

This woman argues for His grace. She acknowledges her humble position before God and embraces being called His pet. She knows He's a master that takes care of all who are in His household.

You'll notice in Scripture Jesus is always impressed with faith. This woman teaches us that we can never lose when we allow Jesus to write the end of our story. I don't know what situation you might be facing, but there is nothing that God cannot get you through.

You wonder how did this woman know to turn to Jesus. Obviously word had gotten out that Jesus can make a difference in your life. Zechariah 8:23 people will say let us go with you because we have heard that the Lord is with you. Others will want to know more about Jesus as we demonstrate what life with Him is all about. The question becomes are people seeking God and feeding from His table because of us?

There is an important message for us disciples—Christ's love is available to all 1 Timothy 2:4 states God desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Mark Buchanon tells about a man selling some old books to a collector and he said I once had an old Bible in my grandfather's attic...someone named Guttenberg printed it. Guttenberg the collector gasped where is it now? Oh I tossed it—it was really old. Do you realize that Bible was worth \$2 million! Then man said not this one, some guy named Luther scribbled all over it.

Sometimes we don't recognize the value of things...we treat precious commodities as worthless.

This is Jesus message to us His disciples--especially when you realize that the people who cross our paths are people that God loves so much that He sent Jesus to die for their sins.

Are we going to treat those around us like the disciples send her away because they annoy us with their needs? Or are we going to reach out and introduce them to the one who can heal their areas of brokenness. Maybe there is someone in your life whose value you might want to rethink and reach out to with Christ's love?

Oh I forgot to tell you what happened on our honeymoon plane ride to Paris...Assume crash positions...My new bride said you're a pastor do something religious, so I got up and took a collection!